

ENCLOSURE A

THE RISKS OF A US GROUND FORCE WITHDRAWAL FROM  
THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

The attached assessment was prepared in response to an 11 May request by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, for a limited assessment of the risks involved in a US ground force withdrawal from South Korea. The judgments are based in large part on a similar Director of Central Intelligence assessment for the President, that has been reviewed by representatives of CIA, DIA, NSA and the Service intelligence organizations.

Portions of the Director of Central Intelligence assessment are quoted extensively, but DIA has expanded and emphasized the military risks. In this respect, the areas of greatest military concern relate to the possibility of:

- substantial reduction in the ability of the South Korean Armed Forces to respond to an attack by superior North Korean forces;
- greatly reduced South Korean intelligence and command-and-control capabilities; and a
- substantial degradation in combat support and combat services support capabilities available to the South Korean ground forces.

The assessment also addresses military-related risks such as the impact of a ground force withdrawal on Pyongyang's perception of the US defense commitment, political stability in the South, and on the South Korean economy.

Measures that would reduce the risks are discussed as is the likely international impact of the withdrawal on the USSR, PRC, Japan, and other countries in East Asia.

Overall, we believe that the withdrawal of US ground forces will not, of itself, undermine the credibility of the US military commitment to South Korea if parties with equities in the Korean peninsula see that the withdrawal is measured, that strong US air and naval forces remain dedicated to the defense of the South, and that the United States takes effective compensatory actions to strengthen the South Korean Armed Forces.

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Approved For Release 2007/03/06 : CIA-RDP79R00603A002500020019-6

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Introduction

The withdrawal of US ground forces from the Republic of Korea (ROK) involves a variety of risks affecting military stability on the Korean Peninsula. Such risks not only involve the Korean military balance, but the reactions of other major powers with vital interests in the region -- notably Japan, the USSR and the PRC. This assessment will address the military and military-related risks of a US ground force withdrawal, measures that would reduce these risks, and the likely international reaction.

Risk Factors

The Setting

The North continues to seek Korean reunification on its own terms and has clearly not ruled out the use of force. It has been deterred by combined US-South Korean military strength and the US commitment to the defense of the South. Since 1970, however, the military balance between North and South Korea alone has changed from a position of rough equality to one that substantially favors the North.

Adverse Impact on ROK Military Capabilities

In the absence of compensating measures, a withdrawal of US ground forces would substantially reduce the ability of the ROK Armed Forces, especially the ROK Army, to respond to an attack by superior North Korean forces.

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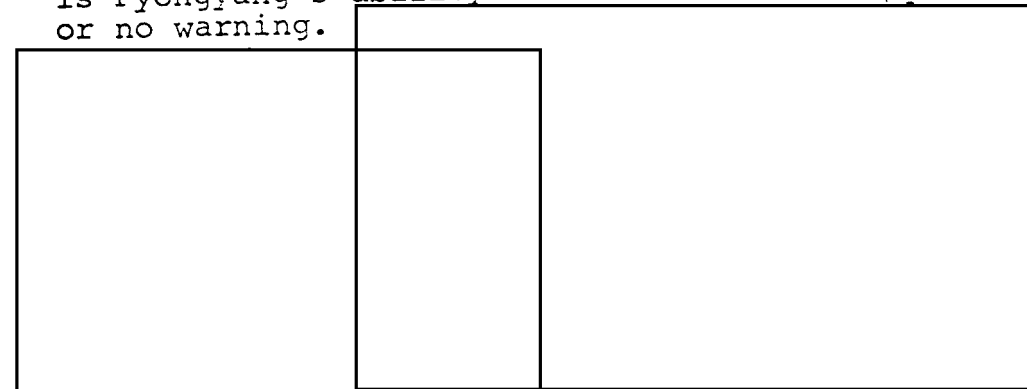
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In the absence of compensating measures, a withdrawal of US ground forces would greatly reduce ROK intelligence and command-and-control capabilities.

- A critical aspect of the threat to South Korea is Pyongyang's ability to attack with little or no warning.

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- ROK inadequacies in command-and-control would become even more pronounced. ROK Army commanders currently rely on the United States for [redacted] assistance in high level joint operational planning. They also lack the mobility of their US counterparts, which itself would severely limit their responsiveness to surprise attack. Were ground-based US forward

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air controllers and tactical air control parties withdrawn, the effectiveness of US close air support could be negated.

- The withdrawal of US ground forces would require redeployment of ROK ground forces. The US 2d Infantry Division is deployed astride the principal invasion routes to Seoul. More than one ROK infantry division would be required to replace the 2d Division in light of its greater mobility and firepower.

In the absence of compensating measures, a withdrawal of US ground forces would substantially degrade combat support and combat service support capabilities in the ROK. US combat support and combat service support units now compensate for ROK Army weaknesses in these areas. The ROK Army cannot develop capabilities equivalent to those provided by the United States for at least five years. 25X1

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Political and Economic Risks

A US ground force withdrawal, combined with a deterioration in US-ROK relations could create political instability in the South.

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A US ground force withdrawal may make it more difficult for South Korea to attract needed foreign capital.

-- South Korea depends on a heavy flow of foreign capital to pay off existing debts, keep the economy growing, and build up its defense industries. Seoul's economic progress over the years has been a critical factor in maintaining political stability and general confidence in the Pak government.

North Korea and the US Ground Force Withdrawal

Any decision by Pyongyang to undertake major hostilities during or after a US withdrawal, would be heavily influenced by

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its perceptions of political conditions in the South, the reliability of the US security commitment, and the military balance. In the event Pyongyang decided to attack the South, its most likely immediate military objective would be the rapid seizure of Seoul, and the consolidation of its gains. The imbalance favoring the North over the South alone is probably sufficient to assure the success of a well-executed military operation to seize the Seoul area. This assessment is based in large part on the ability of the North to achieve sufficient surprise to preclude South Korea from bringing its ground and air capabilities to bear in time to counter such an attack. In so moving, Pyongyang would hope to deny the South the opportunity to bring its larger reserve forces into play, minimize the duration and extent of US involvement, and avoid reliance on Soviet or Chinese military assistance. North Korea might calculate that the United States, China and the USSR would all seek to bring hostilities to an end at the earliest possible time. In such a situation, with the ROK Government likely in disarray, the North would see itself in an extremely advantageous position.

#### Reducing the Risks

The ROK cannot, on its own, correct its military deficiencies and replace the capabilities of the US ground forces over the next five years under the current Force Improvement Plan.

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- South Korea has a limited ability to increase defense allocations above planned levels without seriously reducing economic growth. During the next five years, each additional \$1 billion in annual ROK defense spending above programmed levels will reduce the planned annual increase in GNP by roughly 15 percent. The reduced GNP growth rate in turn would restrict subsequent government revenues, and increase Seoul's difficulty in attracting the large amounts of foreign capital it needs to sustain its export-oriented economy.

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In these circumstances, a strong, unequivocal US effort to strengthen the ROK would be critical to continued stability on the peninsula. Beyond the provision of additional US aid, which would help reduce the ROK military vulnerabilities cited above, the following measures would soften the impact of a US ground force withdrawal.

- Phasing troop withdrawals. A prolonged ground force withdrawal would have a less unfavorable impact than an early compressed withdrawal. Indeed, leaving open the date for the withdrawal of all ground forces would have important effects in Pyongyang and Seoul. Both would view an open-ended schedule as an indication that withdrawal would be governed more by security conditions on the peninsula than by US domestic pressures. Moreover, the continued presence of US ground combat units, although reduced in size, will still confront Pyongyang with the possibility that aggression could result in some form of massive US intervention. Any inclination in the North to undertake provocations during a withdrawal would thus be inhibited. The South might be more inclined to delay assuming greater control of its own forces, or more willing to compromise in determining transfer of command arrangements. The result would be more US restraining influence over possible ROK military reactions.
- Retaining US tactical air capability and a residual logistical support group. Given the military balance, there is little question of the importance of maintaining US tactical air and residual logistic support facilities.
- The augmentation of US air power in the South, continued foreign basing of US Navy and Air Force elements in the Pacific, and demonstrations of US mobility would also reinforce the US security commitment in the eyes of Pyongyang and Seoul. Indeed such measures might cause considerable uncertainty in Pyongyang as to whether the US commitment was really diminished.



International ReactionsPyongyang's Major Allies

A major factor currently shaping the strategic balance in Northeast Asia has been a rare convergence of Chinese and Soviet interest in maintaining Korean stability.

The PRC and USSR approach the Korean situation in ambivalent terms. Both are Pyongyang's treaty allies and traditional military suppliers, and both, in part because of their political rivalry with each other, publicly support North Korea's call for withdrawal of US forces from the South. On the other hand, both Peking and Moscow clearly have placed pursuit of useful relations with the United States and Japan above North Korean ambitions for reunification. They seek to disassociate themselves from Kim Il-song's more rash actions and view the US security commitment to Seoul as a useful ingredient in the mix of factors that keep peace on the peninsula and restrain any Japanese impulse toward rearmament. The Chinese tacitly have taken an especially positive view of US military presence, not only in Korea but throughout East Asia, seeing it as a help in blocking the expansion of Soviet influence in the region.

We lack hard and authoritative information on Moscow's and Peking's reaction to proposed US force reductions in Korea. Low level Soviet commentary has emphasized the likely maintenance of US air power in South Korea, pointing out that this represents continued US support for the Pak government and connotes no real change in the situation. The private comments of a few Chinese officials abroad have been in the same vein.

This scant evidence probably reflects Chinese and Soviet concern that any withdrawal of US ground forces be accomplished in a manner that does not disrupt the basic political and military status quo on the peninsula. As long as a US force reduction is accompanied by effective compensating measures -- and the maintenance of US air and naval power in the area -- it will be seen by Moscow and Peking as a continuation of the US military drawdown in Asia but not as the removal of a credible US security commitment to South Korea.

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Peking and Moscow probably fear that Kim will move too quickly and aggressively toward a "tension-building" policy in the wake of a US force reduction. There is some evidence that Kim unsuccessfully sought Chinese support for such a policy following the fall of Saigon in April 1975.

Moscow and Peking would be motivated to discourage Kim from embarking on a major conflict with all of its troublesome and uncertain implications for Japanese security policy, bilateral relations with the United States, and the power balance in East Asia. But, if Kim became convinced that the United States no longer posed a credible deterrent and that other signs of weakness or instability in the South had opened the door for a quick victory, it is doubtful that either Moscow or Peking would be willing or able to place a veto on the venture.

Moreover, the buildup of offensive military capabilities in the North and its growing self-reliance in arms production suggest that Pyongyang recognizes that it must be able to mount a surprise attack without Soviet and Chinese support. We believe that the North is capable of such an operation.

Moscow and Peking no doubt are anticipating North Korean pressure for increased military assistance in the event that a US force reduction leads to a substantial upgrading of South Korean military capabilities. The Chinese in recent years have been more forthcoming than Moscow in supplying military assistance. But Pyongyang would have to turn primarily to Moscow since China cannot supply the advanced equipment North Korea would require to match a US assistance package for the South.

Moscow has turned a deaf ear to Pyongyang's requests for more sophisticated military equipment in recent years. If, however, they believed that South Korea's military capability had been significantly upgraded, they would probably respond with assistance to strengthen the North. Over the next year or so, Moscow is not likely to respond to requests for offsetting aid in a manner which further tilts the military balance in favor of the North.

We do not believe that a US force reduction, accompanied by compensating measures, would significantly alter current Soviet or Chinese perceptions of the United States as a world power or significantly complicate the US relationship with either. Both, for some time, have seen the United States as generally on the defensive internationally and, more specifically, as unwilling to become engaged in a future land war in Asia. Both will base

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their future calculations of US influence in the East Asian region in large part on the degree to which the United States maintains its ability to project military force as a Pacific power.

Japan

Tokyo prefers that US ground forces remain in Korea, but is resigned to a withdrawal. Japanese perceptions of and policies regarding security issues in Northeast Asia and the peninsula in particular are unlikely to change appreciably.

Japanese leaders want the United States to preserve a maximum presence in Asia. They believe that stability in Korea is essential to Japan's own security. Even so, Japan has been especially wary of direct involvement in South Korean security issues in light of its "no-war" constitution, its limited self-defense forces, and consistently negative Japanese popular attitudes toward issues termed either "Korean" or "military." Although the Japanese public dialogue is now more open [ ] about security issues, Japanese leaders still consider any direct military contribution to South Korean security a political impossibility. 25X1

In 1976-77, the Japanese government voiced greater concern about Washington's intention to withdraw US ground forces than it did in 1970 about the removal of the 7th Infantry Division. In stressing these concerns, Tokyo must realize that it is inviting a US counterproposal, i.e., that Japan more directly contribute to Korean security, something Tokyo is not prepared to do. Specifically, the Japanese are concerned that a withdrawal:

- be undertaken only after a careful review of strategic considerations and explained in such terms. The Japanese do not want a US withdrawal to be perceived as a consequence of US domestic pressures to chastise President Pak. Any evidence that US domestic concerns are overriding the strategic interests of its Asian allies would, in Japanese eyes, call into question American reliability.
- be carefully phased over 4-5 years to lessen the impact on the strategic balance and provide time for strengthening South Korean capabilities.

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- involve consultations with Japan, enabling the government to assimilate US thinking and to demonstrate at home that Washington is taking Tokyo's interests into account. At the same time, the Japanese do not want to be cast in a codeterminant role that might involve responsibilities Tokyo would like to avoid.

In voicing concern about a withdrawal, Tokyo is reassuring South Korea that it remains of paramount importance in Japan's view of the peninsula.

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[redacted] Predictably, Pyongyang has reacted strongly to Tokyo's public support for a continued US military presence in the South. But Tokyo's continuing support for Seoul is no surprise to the North, and the economic benefit of closer ties with Japan may prompt some positive responses by Pyongyang.

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Tokyo does not expect the North to change its hostile attitude toward the South or to abandon its objective of controlling the entire peninsula. The Japanese, however, believe that closer ties with Pyongyang will at least improve their chances of acting as a moderating influence and serve as a hedge against any further unanticipated adjustments in US policy in the region.

Tokyo realizes that its increased nonmilitary involvement in Korean affairs cannot compensate for a shrinking US military presence in the South. Thus, Japan can be expected to continue to work for new international understandings that would shore up stability on the peninsula; in this respect, Tokyo would undoubtedly welcome any new US initiatives and has been quietly representing Seoul's interests in both Moscow and Peking.

#### Elsewhere in East Asia

The ASEAN states share the general concern that stability be maintained on the peninsula and see a continuing link between the maintenance of American power in Asia and their own security. None, with the possible exception of the Philippines, has confidence that the United States would defend them in any regional conflict. But all of them believe that a continued American presence and interest -- including a military presence "over the horizon" -- is an essential element in maintaining the present equilibrium in Southeast as well as Northeast Asia.

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The Chinese Nationalists on Taiwan probably will see a withdrawal of ground forces from South Korea as reinforcing their view of Washington's reduction of its commitments in East Asia and of the inevitability of an eventual normalization of relations between Washington and Peking. Over the short term, however, Taipei may also argue that the United States should not simultaneously withdraw its ground forces in South Korea and abrogate its security treaty with the Nationalists.

Elsewhere, North Korea may hope that a US ground force withdrawal from South Korea will be seen as vindicating its policies and thus provide additional support for Pyongyang. We believe, however, that US withdrawal plans will more likely work against North Korea's efforts to mobilize world opinion against Seoul and Washington. Support for North Korea in the Third World has leveled off in the last year or so due to Pyongyang's blunt tactics and an effective counterattack by South Korea and the United States. With a US withdrawal underway, the Korean problem in general is likely to become less urgent in the nonaligned movement, even for Third World militants. Indeed, the United States and South Korea may find it easier to focus international attention on the key issue of maintaining stability on the Korean Peninsula.

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Approved For Release 2007/03/06 : CIA-RDP79R00603A002500020019-6

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